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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, PDEV, PFOR, UK(NI)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: HMG ON SECURITY AND CONVENTION
REPORT

REF: LONDON (NOTAL)

SUMMARY - COMMONS DEBATE ON NI CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
REPORT WAS PRECEDED BY PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT ON NI
SECURITY SITUATION IN WHICH HE ANNOUNCED ADDITIONAL MEASURES
BEING TAKEN IN SOUTH ARMAGH. DEBATE OPENED WITH STATEMENT
BY NI SECRETARY REES WHO REAFFIRMED HMG'S COMMITMENT TO REMAIN
IN NI. DESCRIBED POSITIVE ACHIEVEMENTS
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OF CONVENTION AND REJECTED THOSE PORTIONS OF REPORT DEAL-

ING WITH GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE ON GROUNDS THEY DID NOT ENJOY WIDESPREAD ACCEPTANCE IN NI. HMG WILL PUBLISH WHITE PAPER DETAILING POINTS REQUIRING FURTHER WORK BY CONVENTION AND WILL RECONVENE CONVENTION FOR FOUR WEEKS, BEGINNING FEBRUARY 3. CONVENTION WILL RECONSIDER CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK IN EFFORT TO FIND CONSENSUS. SHOULD IT FAIL TO PROGRESS DURING SPECIFIED PERIOD, CONVENTION WILL BE DISOLVED AND DIRECT RULE CONTINUED. REACTION WAS PREDICTABLE: UNIONISTS PROTESTED, STRESSING THEIR MAJORITY RIGHTS; OPPOSITION BENCHES SUPPORTED GOVERNMENT; AND A FEW LABOR BACKBENCHERS CALLED FOR GOVERNMENT TO CUT AND RUN. THERE WAS NO DOUBT THAT GOVERNMENT RETAINED OVERWHELMING SUPPORT OF COMMONS DESPITE ABSENCE OF VOTE ON EITHER ISSUE. WHILE IT IS FOOLHARDY TO PREDICT DEVELOPMENTS IN NI, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT UUUC WILL RECONSIDER, IF NOT REVISE, ITS POSITION ON MINORITY PARTICIPATION IN DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER WILSON ADDRESSED SECURITY SITUATION IN SOUTH ARMAGH. ANNOUNCING ADDITIONAL MEASURES BEING TAKEN BY HMG. IN ADDITION TO SPEARHEAD BATTALION AND SPECIAL AIR SERVICES (SAS) TROOPS (REFTEL), HMG HAS INCREASED POLICY FORCES IN AREA. SECURITY FORCES. IN ATTEMPTING TO CONTROL SITUATION. WILL: ESTABLISH ADDITIONAL CHECK POINTS; MAKE INCREASED USE OF IDENTITY CHECKS. UTILIZING NEW, COMPUTERIZED INFORMATION SYSTEM; STEP UP BORDER SURVEILLANCE; USE EXISTING POWERS TO QUESTION SUSPECTS TO FULLEST; CONDUCT MORE SEARCHES OF HOUSES; AND UTILIZE ARREST POWERS FULLY. HMG IS ALSO CONSIDERING ADDITIONAL, UNSPECIFIED MEASURES. WILSON PAID SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO COOPERATION OF GOI. NOTING THAT JOINT EFFORTS WERE KEY TO DEALING WITH BORDER PROBLEM' AS SHOWN IN RECENT MURDER OF TEN SOUTH ARMAGH PROTESTANTS (HMG IS CERTAIN THIS ATTACK ORIGINATED IN REPUBLIC AND TERRORISTS RETURNED TO OTHER SIDE OF BORDER IMMEDIATELY AFTER COMMITTING OUTRAGE).

2. WILSON'S STATEMENT WAS DESIGNED TO SEPARATE SECURITY ISSUE FROM CONVENTION REPORT. THUS ENSURING DEBATE ON LATTER DID NOT BECOME BOGGED DOWN BITTER ARGUMENT. IT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WAS SUCCESSFUL PLOY.

3. NI SECRETARY REES OPENED DEBATE ON CONVENTION REPORT WITH LONG STATEMENT (TEXT POUCH) REAFFIRMING HMG'S INTENTION TO STAY IN NI, DISMISSING CALLS FOR BRITISH WITHDRAWAL, DESCRIBING GOVERNMENT'S POSITION ON REPORT AND RECALLING CONTENTION FOR FOUR WEEKS. REES EMPHASIZED THAT WHILE REPORT CONTAINED MANY DISCREET ADVANCES IN

TERMS OF GENERAL AGREEMENT,IT FAILED TO MEET PRINCIPAL
TEST: A GOVERNMENTAL FRAMEWORK PROVIDING "PARTNERSHIP
AND PARTICIPATION ON A BASIS WHICH COMMANDS THE MOST
WIDESPREAD ACCEPTANCE." THRUST OF STATEMENT HOWEVER,
WAS POSITIVE. IT DESCRIBED AREAS IN WHICH CONSENSUS HAD
BEEN ACHIEVED (E.G., FORM OF GOVERNMENT. FUNCTIONS TO BE
DEVOLVED), OFFERED PROSPECT OF GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT TO
IMPORTANT UNIONIST RECOMMENDATIONS (E.G., INCREASED RE-
PRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT, TRANSFER OF POLICE FUNCTIONS)

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AND OUT TO REQ'T SEVERAL UNIONIST BOGIES (E.G., POSSIBILITY OF WITHDRAWAL, COUNCIL OF IRELAND OR OTHER INSTITUTIONAL LINK WITH REPUBLIC). THE TASK OF RECALLED CONVENTION, REES SAID, IS TO CONSIDER HOW: PROPOSED COMMITTEE SYSTEM COULD BE INCORPORATED IN "WIDER AND ACCEPTABLE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK WHICH PROVIDES FOR PARTNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION"; WIDER COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE CAN BE ENGENDERED; AND WHETHER PROGRESS TOWARD FULLY DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT MIGHT BEST BE MADE ON EVOLUTIONARY BASIS. BEGINNING FEBRUARY 3 IT WILL HAVE FOUR WEEKS TO SEE IF PROGRESS ON THESE POINTS CAN BE ATTAINED. IN INTERIM, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HMG WILL PUBLISH WHITE PAPER DETAILING MATTERS WHICH GOVERNMENT WISHES CONVENTION TO RECONSIDER. STRONGLY IMPLIED, THOUGH NOT ARTICULATED, WAS THREAT THAT FAILURE OF CONVENTION TO ADVANCE WOULD MEAN CONTINUED DIRECT RULE, COUPLED WITH MORE ACTIVIST HMG ROLE IN ANY FUTURE EFFORTS TO DEFINE CONSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS FOR DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT.

4. CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN AIREY NEAVE ENDORSED GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL AND ITS INSISTENCE ON CONSTITUTION THAT WOULD "COMMAND WIDESPREAD SUPPORT THROUGHOUT COMMUNITY," THOUGH HE STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF NI SECURITY IN ATTAINING THIS GOAL. TORY BACKBENCHERS UNIFORMLY SUPPORTED GOVERNMENT, WITH FORMER LEADER EDWARD HEATH NOTING THAT PUBLIC FRUSTRATION WITH NI COULD DEVELOP TO POINT THAT HMG WOULD BE UNABLE TO RESIST DEMANDS FOR WITHDRAWAL. SEVERAL LABOR BACKBENCHERS SUGGESTED WITHDRAWAL AS ONLY WAY TO RESOLVE NI IMPASSE, BUT FOUND NO SUPPORT ELSEWHERE IN COMMONS. /UNIONISTS. AS ANTICIPATED, DIRECTLY OR IMPLICITLY REJECTED GOVERNMENT'S POSITION. THOUGH UUUC LEADER MOLYNEAUX, WHEN PRESSED BY NI MINISTER ORME, AFFIRMED THAT HE WOULD OPPOSE UUUC BOYCOTT OF RECONVENED CONVENTION. SDLP LEADER FITT SAID HIS PARTY IS PREPARED TO BEGIN TALKS WITH UNIONISTS IMMEDIATELY AND EXPRESSED VIEW THAT GOOD WILL ON BOTH SIDES WOULD PERMIT CONVENTION TO DEVISE GOVERNMENT SYSTEM BASED ON "COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP." STRONGEST ENDORSEMENT. HOWEVER, CAME FROM DISSIDENT UNIONIST CRAIE WHO WELCOMED GOVERNMENT'S STATEMENT, AS- SERTED THAT UUUC POSITION WAS NOT SUPPORTED BY MAJORITY OF UNIONIST VOTERS AND OPTIMISTICALLY OPINED THAT ONE MONTH WOULD BE SUFFICIENT FOR CONVENTION TO REACH AGREEMENT.

5. COMMENT: REES' STATEMENT FOLLOWED OUTLINE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY (REFTEL) AND INITIAL REACTION WAS AS WE HAD ANTICIPATED. EXCEPT THAT UNIONISTS WERE A BIT MORE SUB- DUE THAN WE HAD EXPECTED. MOST DRAMATIC ASPECTS OF

STATEMENT WERE EXPLICIT REPUDIATION OF INSTITUTIONAL
LINK BETWEEN NI AND REPUBLIC, PUBLICLY AFFIRMING POSI-
TION WHICH HAD BECOME INCREASINGLY APPARENT IN BOTH
LONDON AND DUBLIN, AND TIME LIMIT ON RECALLED CONVENTION.
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HMG COORDINATED ITS POSITION CLOSELY WITH GOI AND DOES
NOT EXPECT STRONG REACTION FROM THAT QUARTER. TIME LI-
MIT IS CLEARLY DEVICE TO FORCE UNIONISTS TO BARGAIN WITH
OPPOSITION. CONVENTION CAN BE EXTENDED, AND THERE IS
LITTLE DOUBT HMG WILL DO SO IF SOME PROGRESS IS MADE AND
FURTHER TIME REQUIRED. WE BELIEVE GOVERNMENT'S PRESEN-
TATION OF ITS CASE WAS SUPERB. WHETHER ITS OVERALL STRA-
TEGY WILL ALTER UNIONIST ATTITUDES IS ANYBODY'S GUESS.
HMG, HOWEVER, IS BETTING THAT IT WILL AT LEAST SUCCEED
IN SPLITTING UNIONIST COALITION, CHANGING CONVENTION BAL-
ANCE. FROM UNIONIST REACTION IN COMMONS -- ESPECIALLY
MOLYNEAUX'S RESPONSE TO ORME'S CHALLENGE -- WE ARE IN-
CLINED TO BELIEVE HMG HAS IMPROVED THE ODDS AND THAT
THERE IS NOW SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN EVEN CHANCE SUFFICIENT
PROGRESS WILL BE ACHIEVED TO KEEP THE CONVENTION ALIVE.

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